

# UGANDA 2022 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Uganda is a constitutional republic led since 1986 by President Yoweri Museveni of the National Resistance Movement party. In 2021, voters re-elected Museveni to a sixth consecutive five-year term and returned a National Resistance Movement majority to the unicameral parliament. The elections fell short of international standards and included allegations of arbitrary killings and disappearances of opposition supporters, disenfranchisement and voter intimidation, harassment of the opposition, closure of social media websites, and lack of transparency and independence in the Electoral Commission.

The national police maintain internal security, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs oversees police. The president detailed army officials to leadership roles within police and the executive, including government ministries. The law allows the military to support police operations to maintain internal security. The Ministry of Defense oversees the army. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were reports that members of the security forces committed numerous abuses, with only a few low-ranking officers purportedly punished.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: unlawful or arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings; forced disappearance; torture and cases of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by government agencies; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; political prisoners or detainees; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; punishment of family members for alleged offenses by a relative; serious abuses in a conflict, including unlawful civilian harm; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media, including violence, threats of violence, and unjustified arrests or prosecution of journalists, and censorship; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations; serious flaws with

citizens' ability to determine their government through free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious government corruption; serious government restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; lack of investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence, including domestic and intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and child, early, and forced marriage; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons; and existence of laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, albeit not fully enforced.

The government was reluctant to investigate, prosecute, or punish officials who committed human rights abuses or engaged in corruption, whether in the security services or elsewhere in government, and impunity, including for serious abuses, was a problem.

## **Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person**

### **a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings**

There were several reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. The law provides for government agencies to investigate, inquire into, and prosecute unlawful killings by the security forces. Human rights campaigners, however, claimed these agencies were largely ineffective. The constitution established the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) to investigate any person or group of persons for abuses of any human right (see section 5). The Police Disciplinary Court has the power to hear cases of officers who breach the police disciplinary code of conduct. Military courts have the power to hear cases against officers that break military law, which bars soldiers from targeting or killing nonmilitants.

Opposition activists, local media, human rights activists, and religious leaders reported that security forces killed some individuals the government identified as dissidents and those whom it accused of criminal activity. Members of parliament and civil society organizations reported that the military carried out extrajudicial killings while carrying out law enforcement operations in the Karamoja subregion

and among fishing communities. On February 28, local media reported that police officers at Nakyakolede Police Post in Kasubi, Kampala, had killed Hussein Kakumba, age 14, while interrogating him for alleged theft. According to local media, Kakumba's guardian reported Kakumba to police on allegation of stealing 1.1 million shillings (\$299). According to a police statement, Kakumba died of his injuries at Mulago National Referral Hospital after the commander of the Nakyakolede Police Post, Michael Amuge, assaulted him while interrogating him concerning the missing funds. Police stated they launched a murder investigation into Amuge's conduct but officials did not report any findings by year's end.

## **b. Disappearance**

There were numerous reports of disappearances by government authorities. Local media, opposition political parties, and human rights lawyers reported that the military – particularly the Chieftaincy for Military Intelligence (CMI) and the Special Forces Command (SFC) – and police continued to hold individuals, often opposition supporters, at unidentified locations without charge. The opposition National Unity Platform (NUP) party reported that while an unspecified number of its supporters remained unaccounted for, the security forces continued to randomly detain its supporters without trial.

On August 10, parliament's Committee on Human Rights reported that according to UHRC figures, seven opposition supporters remained missing, five of whom security agencies detained in 2020 and two in December 2021. The UHRC reported in June that it investigated reports of 69 disappearances and successfully ordered the release of 64 detainees. The UHRC also recommended that the Uganda Police Force investigate all cases of enforced disappearance and ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted. Military and police forces repeatedly denied holding persons without trial and noted that all persons they detained had either been released or arraigned in court.

In September NUP officials reported that plain clothes security officers riding in unmarked vans arrested and detained NUP supporters who had recorded videos mocking ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party officials; some of the NUP supporters remained unaccounted for (see section 2). On November 30, the NUP reported that it submitted to several government offices, including the

UHRC, a list of 24 persons who went missing between 2019 and 2022. On December 5, the UHRC acknowledged receipt of the list from the NUP and announced a nationwide search for missing NUP supporters. On December 6, the minister for justice and constitutional affairs stated that government instituted a cabinet committee on human rights, which would investigate allegations of disappearance of opposition supporters. Neither the UHRC nor the cabinet committee had released findings of their search by year's end.

### **c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses**

The constitution and law prohibit such practices. The law stipulates that any person convicted of an act of torture may receive a sentence of 15 years' imprisonment, a monetary fine, or both. The penalty for conviction of aggravated torture is life imprisonment. Nevertheless, there were credible reports security forces tortured and physically abused suspects. Impunity was a problem.

In November the UN Committee Against Torture stated that it was "deeply concerned by reports that torture and ill-treatment continue to be widespread and frequently practiced in Uganda." Human rights lawyers, the UHRC, parliament's Committee on Human Rights, opposition politicians, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Human Rights Watch (HRW), and local media reported that security agencies tortured dissidents as well as suspects as punishment for their criticism of the government and its officials and to extract self-incriminating confessions, sometimes leading to death (see section 1.a). In January the Uganda Prisons Service (UPS) reported that between 2020 and January it had received 121 suspects in custody who bore injuries on their bodies. Also in January the UHRC reported that between 2020 and January it recorded more than 500 complaints of torture and other cases of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment.

In December 2021, SFC officers arrested satirist Kakwenza Rukirabashaija at his home in Kampala. The day prior, Rukirabashaija had tweeted criticism of some members of the first family, describing the president as corrupt and his son, the then Commander of Land Forces General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, as obese and effeminate (see section 1.e and 2.a). On January 11, police arraigned Rukirabashaija in court and, in the absence of his lawyers and family, charged him

with two counts of “offensive communication.” Rukirabashaija remained in detention until January 25 when the court granted him bail. In media interviews published in February, Rukirabashaija said his body bore 63 scars from torture he experienced at the hands of SFC officers. He stated that, during his detention, SFC officers deprived him of sleep and forced him to dance, kicked him, beat him with sticks, and on numerous occasions tore off his flesh using a pair of pliers. He said the officers then forced him to appear on camera and record an apology to the president and Kainerugaba. On February 9, Rukirabashaija went into exile after a court denied him leave to seek healthcare abroad. His trial continued at year’s end.

HRW reported that Internal Security Organization (ISO) officers stole money from detainees kept at unofficial detention facilities and extorted money from their families to secure their release. On March 22, HRW reported that ISO officers forced a detainee to surrender his debit card as well as his personal identification number, proceeded to withdraw one million shillings (\$272) from his account, and later drove the detainee to a bank and forced him to withdraw an unspecified amount.

Human rights organizations and political opposition parties reported that government agents committed acts of rape and sexual abuse against detainees. On March 22, HRW reported that ISO officer Charles Opoka in 2019, twice raped a then-pregnant detainee held at an unofficial detention facility in Kyengera town, colloquially referred to as Base One, and beat her with shoes, causing her to miscarry and eventually undergo a hysterectomy.

Impunity was a problem, and was widespread in police, the military, the prisons service, and the executive branch. The security forces did not take adequate measures to investigate and punish officers implicated in human rights abuses, especially in incidents involving political opposition members. Authorities encouraged and gave political and judicial cover to officials who committed human rights abuses. Police and military collaborated with the International Committee of the Red Cross, the UHRC, and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to organize several training sessions on human rights protection during law enforcement operations.

## **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

Conditions in prisons and detention centers remained harsh and, in some cases, life-threatening due to gross overcrowding, inadequate sanitary conditions, physical abuse of detainees by security staff and fellow inmates, inadequate food, and understaffing. In November the UN Committee Against Torture stated that it “remains concerned at reports indicating that the practice [of using “ungazetted” or unauthorized places of detention or “safe houses”] still takes place in the country.”

**Abusive Physical Conditions:** Gross overcrowding remained a problem in prisons, police cells, and unofficial detention facilities. In September prison officials reported that prisons with a capacity of 19,986 held 70,535 inmates. The UPS reported that lengthy pretrial detention as well as an inmate population rate that outstripped the rate at which prisons were able to expand were the leading drivers of overcrowding. In November the UN Committee Against Torture stated its “concern at reports indicating that overcrowding in prisons had resulted in limited access to bedding and sleeping space, poor health care and drug stock shortages in detention facilities.” The Committee stated that “reports indicate that ill-treatment still occurs, especially beating of inmates by ‘katikiros’ (leaders appointed among inmates) and prison warders imposing solitary confinement and caning as disciplinary measures. The Committee [noted] the establishment of human rights committees mandated to monitor places of detention but [remained] concerned at reports that they are not functional and that their members have limited knowledge and skills regarding human rights violations.”

On June 22, Chief Justice Alphonse Owiny-Dollo referred to the conditions in Gulu prison as “horrific,” noting that the prison was holding 1,365 inmates in a 247-person-capacity structure. On February 17, members of parliament’s Committee on Defense and Internal Affairs reported that inmates in prisons in Gulu and Lira Districts were packed so tightly that some lacked space to lie down. This overcrowding enabled some prisoners to sexually abuse other inmates. Members of the committee also noted that prisoners lacked access to toilets at night and instead used buckets, which often overflowed and exposed inmates to disease. The prisons acknowledged 29 of 261 prison facilities still used buckets as toilets but added that the prisons service was gradually working to eliminate the practice. According to local media, some opposition members of parliament

complained on April 21 that some women inmates lacked access to sanitary pads and were bitten by lice while in detention. The prisons, however, stated all women prisoners had access to menstrual hygiene materials. The prisons also reported that lice infestation resulted from the admission of new inmates, who carried lice on their bodies and among their effects. In September the UPS reported that it trained and deployed 17 teams to carry out fumigation of prison facilities to fight lice infestation. Most prisons did not have accommodations for persons with disabilities, and police often detained child and adult suspects together.

**Administration:** Authorities did not always carry out investigations into credible allegations of mistreatment. Previous detainees told local media that CMI held up to hundreds of detainees in a basement at its headquarters and denied them access to visitors.

**Independent Monitoring:** Local human rights organizations reported that the prisons service continued its suspension of monitoring visits as part of measures to combat COVID-19. The International Committee of the Red Cross reported that it visited 30 places of detention in accordance with its standard procedures. Findings from these visits on detainees' treatment and living conditions were submitted to and discussed confidentially with authorities, including the military, police, and prisons service.

**Improvements:** In January the prisons service reported that it had instituted staff and prisoner human rights committees in all prisons to monitor human rights observance and awareness. It also reported that it had trained more than 95 percent of its staff on human rights awareness. The prisons service also reported that it installed video conferencing facilities in 16 prisons to enable virtual court sessions.

#### **d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention**

Although the law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, security forces often arbitrarily arrested and detained persons, especially opposition leaders; politicians; activists; demonstrators; journalists; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons; and members of the general population accused of violating COVID-19 restrictions. The law provides for the right of persons to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court, but this mechanism

was seldom employed and rarely successful.

### **Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

The law requires that judges or prosecutors issue a warrant before authorities make an arrest unless the arrest occurs during commission of a crime or while in pursuit of a perpetrator. Nevertheless, authorities often arrested suspects without warrants. The law requires authorities to arraign suspects within 48 hours of arrest, but they frequently held suspects longer without charge. Authorities must try suspects arrested for capital offenses within 360 days (120 days if charged with an offense triable by subordinate courts) or release them on bail; however, if prosecutors present the case to a court before the expiration of this period, there is no limit on further pretrial detention. While the law requires authorities to inform detainees immediately of the reasons for detention, at times they did not do so. The law provides for bail at the judge's discretion, but many suspects were unaware of the law or lacked the financial means to cover the bond. Judges generally granted requests for bail. The law provides detainees the right to legal representation and access to a lawyer, but authorities did not always respect this right. The law requires the government to provide an attorney for indigent defendants charged with capital offenses, and the government adhered to this requirement. Most defendants endured significant delays through the judicial process before the conclusion of their cases. Security forces often held opposition political members and other suspects incommunicado, under house arrest, or both.

**Arbitrary Arrest:** Arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention, particularly of dissidents, remained problems. Police and military officials on numerous occasions arrested and harassed opposition politicians, their supporters, and private citizens who engaged in peaceful protests or held public rallies. On May 2, local media reported that CMI officers had arrested Obed Katureebe, a public affairs officer at the Uganda Media Centre, a government agency, and detained him at an illegal facility following allegations that he ran a social media account, using a pseudonym, which insulted Rwanda's President Paul Kagame. The government spokesperson and Executive Director of the Uganda Media Centre, Ofwono Opondo, stated on May 4 that security service officials had arrested Katureebe for his protection because "there was an indication he could be harmed." On July 4, the UHRC wrote to CMI stating that CMI had "unlawfully detained" Katureebe,



ordering his immediate release. On July 6, local media reported that Katureebe's wife, Phiona Kanuuna, wrote to President Museveni complaining that Museveni's son, General Kainerugaba, ordered CMI officials to arrest Katureebe, at which time they confiscated his computers and cell phones without a court order and gave them to Rwandan security officials (see section 1.f). On July 21, local media reported that CMI released Katureebe without charge.

**Pretrial Detention:** Case backlogs due to an inefficient judiciary, inadequate police investigations, the absence of plea bargaining prior to 2015, insufficient use of bail, the absence of a time limit for the detention of detainees awaiting trial, and COVID-19 countermeasures contributed to frequent prolonged pretrial detentions. There was not sufficient information available to determine if pretrial detentions frequently equaled or exceeded the maximum sentence for the alleged crime. In September prison officials reported that the population of pretrial detainees accounted for 49 percent of the country's 70,535 inmates.

#### **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, but the government did not always respect judicial independence and impartiality. Corruption, understaffing, inefficiency, and executive-branch interference with judicial rulings often undermined the courts' independence. Human rights activists, lawyers, judicial officers, and local media reported that on many occasions, security agencies defied court orders to release detainees or arraign persons they had detained without charge, and that security agents intimidated judicial officers from offering bail to political detainees. On September 22, President Museveni stated that "the judiciary cannot be independent of the Ugandan people," adding that government agencies sometimes do not respect court orders "because they do not agree" with them and explaining that executive branch officials would, at their discretion, disregard some court rulings. Activists also reported that due to a lack of judicial independence, the judiciary unnecessarily delayed human rights petitions by denying hearing dates or prolonging hearing sessions.

The president appoints Supreme Court justices, Court of Appeal and High Court judges, and members of the Judicial Service Commission (which makes recommendations on appointments to the judiciary) with the approval of

parliament.

Judicial corruption was a problem, and local media reported numerous cases where judicial officers in lower courts solicited and accepted bribes from the parties involved.

### **Trial Procedures**

The law provides for the right to a fair and public trial, but the government did not always enforce this right. Although the law provides for a presumption of innocence, authorities did not always respect this right. An inadequate system of judicial administration resulted in a serious backlog of cases, undermining suspects' right to a timely trial. All nonmilitary trials are public. The law allows military courts to try civilians who assist members of the military in committing offenses or are found possessing arms, ammunition, or other equipment reserved for the armed forces. Military courts prosecuted NUP supporters wearing red berets, a clothing item common to both NUP and the military. Civilians charged in military courts were often denied the right to a public trial, to communicate with an attorney of their choice, and to file an appeal in the civilian court system.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

Authorities detained numerous opposition politicians and activists on politically motivated grounds. Authorities released many without charge but charged others in military courts with crimes such as illegal possession of firearms, "offensive communication," and inciting violence. According to human rights lawyers, military courts were less independent than their civilian counterparts and allowed authorities to hold detainees indefinitely. No reliable statistics on the total number of political detainees or prisoners were available. Human rights organizations reported that prison authorities blocked them from visiting political prisoners and detainees as part of measures to stop the spread of COVID-19. The International Committee of the Red Cross and the UHRC reported that authorities granted them access to places of detention.

In September 2021, police arrested NUP members of parliament Muhammad Ssegirinya and Allan Ssewanyana in relation to the killing of nearly 30 elderly persons in Masaka District. The public prosecutor charged the lawmakers with

terrorism, murder, and attempted murder, and a magistrate remanded them to Kitale prison. In September 2021, a court granted bail to the two lawmakers, but plainclothes military officers rearrested them upon their release outside the gates of Kitale prison. In October 2021, the public prosecutor charged Ssegirinya with inciting violence in relation to a social media post made on a Facebook group bearing his name in 2020 that warned of a possible genocide against an unspecified group in the country (see section 2.a, Internet Freedom subsection) and a 2021 protest. Also in October 2021, local media reported that Ssegirinya had complained to court officials that military officers abused him during his second arrest by inflicting cuts into his feet and squeezing his genitalia. On July 28, local media reported that five suspects arrested alongside the two members of parliament told court that CMI officers had tortured them before forcing them to record false testimony implicating the lawmakers. On September 12, a court dismissed the incitement to violence charges against Ssegirinya for lack of evidence. The lawmakers remained imprisoned at year's end.

### **Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies**

Individuals or organizations may seek civil remedies for human rights abuses through the regular court system or the UHRC, which has judicial powers from the constitution. The law also empowers the courts to grant restitution, rehabilitation, or compensation to victims of human rights abuses, as well as to hold public officials involved in human rights abuses personally liable, including contributing to compensation or restitution costs. The UHRC's powers include the authority to order the release of detainees, pay compensation to victims, and pursue other legal and administrative remedies, such as mediation. Civil courts and the UHRC have no ability to hold perpetrators of human rights abuses criminally liable.

Bureaucratic delays hampered enforcement of judgments granting financial compensation to victims. The government rarely complied with judicial decisions related to human rights. The UHRC reported that victims of human rights abuses to whom it awarded compensation "still faced challenges in claiming their compensation awards from institutions that the tribunal ordered to pay them."

### **f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home,**

## **or Correspondence**

The constitution and law prohibit such actions, but there were reports the government failed to respect these prohibitions. There were reports that government authorities entered homes without judicial or other appropriate authorization; accessed, collected, or used private communications or personal data arbitrarily or without appropriate legal authority (see section 1.d); implemented regulations and practices that allow for the arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, including the use of technology arbitrarily or unlawfully to surveil or interfere with the privacy of individuals; used technologies and practices including internet and social media controls, blocking or filtering of websites and social media platforms, sensors, biometric data collection, and data analytics; and punished family members for offenses allegedly committed by relatives. The law authorizes government security agencies to tap private conversations to combat terrorism-related offenses. The government invoked the law to monitor telephone and internet communications.

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties**

### **a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media**

The constitution and law provide for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, but the government often restricted this right.

**Freedom of Expression:** The government restricted citizens' ability to criticize its actions or to discuss matters of public interest. On September 2, NUP leader Robert Kyagulanyi (also known as Bobi Wine) reported that NUP supporter Teddy Nalubowa had gone missing after unidentified men detained her. On September 9, local media reported that the public prosecutor charged Nalubowa in the absence of her lawyers with "offensive communication" and disturbing "the peace, quiet or right to privacy" of President Museveni after she posted a TikTok video in which she mocked a deceased military officer, General Elly Tumwine, and added that Museveni would also die. The court remanded Nalubowa to Luzira prison and her trial continued at year's end. In December 2021, SFC officers arrested satirist

Kakwenza Rukirabashaija after he tweeted criticism of members of the first family (see section 1.c.).

The government restricted dissident authors from holding events to promote publications critical of authorities and restricted some political symbols. On August 15, a court martial convicted three NUP supporters of illegal possession of military supplies for wearing red berets associated with the NUP. The court sentenced each to a jail term of one year, 11 months, and three days, equivalent to their time previously served, and then released them.

**Violence and Harassment:** Security forces subjected journalists and media houses to violence, harassment, and intimidation. On March 10, military and police officers raided the offices of the online media company The Alternative Digitalk TV and arrested nine staff members as they prepared to host the launch of a book titled *Liars and Accomplices* that was critical of the government. A police spokesperson stated the nine were involved in offensive communication. The military officers detained the nine at the police Special Investigations Division in Kireka until March 16, when it released seven of them without charge but held Norman Muhimbise and Faridah Bikobere, whom it arraigned on March 18 and charged with “offensive communication” and cyber stalking of the president. A court remanded the two to prison until March 21, when it released them on bail. Their trial continued at year’s end.

**Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media:** Journalists, opposition politicians, and human rights activists reported that authorities wielded control over editorial decisions at public broadcasters and at some private media outlets as well. The government penalized those who published items counter to its guidelines and directly and indirectly censored media, including by controlling licensing and advertising, instructing editors to suspend critical journalists, and arresting and beating journalists. Government officials and ruling party members owned many of the private rural radio stations and imposed reporting restrictions. Media practitioners stated government and security agents occasionally called editors and instructed them to refrain from publishing stories that portrayed the government negatively, hosting critical commentators on radio and television talk shows, and discussing some political matters. The police’s Media and Political Crimes Unit and the

communications regulator, Uganda Communications Commission, closely monitored all radio, television, and print media. The government maintained a 2021 ban of Facebook stemming from the company's suspension of accounts linked to government officials for "inauthentic behavior." Journalists, facing government pressure, practiced self-censorship.

**Libel/Slander Laws:** Authorities and individual public figures used libel, defamation, and slander laws to suppress criticism of government officials. On February 22, a lawyer filed a private prosecution against human rights lawyer Isaac Ssemakadde for "offensive communication" and criminal libel in response to Ssemakadde's criticism of court decisions made by High Court Justice Musa Ssekaana. The case continued at year's end.

**National Security:** Authorities cited laws protecting national security to restrict criticism of government policies. Journalists stated that government officials intimidated media houses for reporting on disagreements among senior military commanders, by threatening to revive old criminal investigations against them.

## **Internet Freedom**

The government restricted and disrupted access to the internet, censored online content, monitored internet communications without appropriate legal authority, blocked access, pressured internet platforms and technology companies to restrict content, charged individuals with crimes punishable by civil fines or criminal punishments, punished internet users who expressed divergent political views, prohibited online anonymity for some individuals, disrupted communications prior to elections or planned demonstrations, and used bots or trolls to manipulate social media discourse. Parliament passed an amendment to the Computer Misuse Act, which made it illegal to "write, send, or share any information through a computer, which is likely to ridicule, degrade, or demean another person, group of persons, a tribe, an ethnicity, a religion or gender." Security agencies used the Computer Misuse Act to detain and torture dissidents who shared on social media opinions critical of government and public officials and charged them with offensive communication (see Sections 1.c., 1.e., and 2.a., Freedom of Expression).

Opposition political parties reported that government security agents made

numerous attempts to hack and take control of their social media accounts. Government spokespersons also accused the opposition NUP of sponsoring bot accounts on Twitter to harass and attack government officials.

### **Restrictions on Academic Freedom and Cultural Events**

The government restricted artistic presentations, including music lyrics and theatrical performances. Academics and human rights activists reported that authorities prevented the appointment of opposition-leaning academics to senior positions at public universities. The NUP reported that the government continued to ban Kyagulanyi (Bobi Wine) from holding concerts and instructed event organizers not to book him for performances.

### **b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

The government restricted freedoms of peaceful assembly and association. Government failure to investigate or prosecute attacks on human rights defenders and peaceful protesters led to de facto restrictions on freedom of assembly and association.

#### **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly, but the government did not respect this right. The government blocked peaceful protests by the opposition, civil society activists, and trade unionists using defunct provisions of the Public Order Management Act as well as restrictions to combat COVID-19 and the Sudan Ebola Virus Disease.

On March 19, police intercepted opposition activist Kizza Besigye on his way to Kampala where he intended to hold protests against the cost of living. Police officers barricaded his vehicle for eight hours and confiscated a megaphone Besigye was using to address the crowd. On May 12, police arrested Besigye outside his home in Kasangati as he attempted to start another protest against the rising cost of living. Police returned him to his house and detained him there until May 18. A police spokesperson stated Besigye had attempted to organize an illegal protest. A court in 2020, however, annulled as unconstitutional provisions of the Public Order Management Act that gave police veto-like powers over public

assemblies. Again on May 23, police officers arrested Besigye in Kampala where he had started a rally to protest the rising cost of living and charged him in court on May 25 with inciting violence. The court granted Besigye bail of 30 million shillings (\$8,150), which he rejected as excessive. The court remanded Besigye to Luzira prison until July 1, when the court revised his bail down to 2.5 million shillings (\$679), which he promptly paid. His trial continued at year's end.

## **Freedom of Association**

While the constitution and law provide for freedom of association, the government did not respect this right. The government restricted the operations of local NGOs, especially those that worked on civil and political rights, including LGBTQI+ rights (see section 6, Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceable Assembly). Government regulations require NGOs to disclose sources of funding and personal information regarding their employees and impose onerous registration and reporting requirements. They enable the NGO Bureau, a government agency that formally registers organizations, and its local-level structures to deny registration to any organization focused on topics deemed “undesirable” or “prejudicial” to the “dignity of the people of Uganda.” The regulations also provide the NGO Bureau broad powers to inspect NGO offices and records and to suspend their activities without due process. The NGO Bureau imposed registration, permit renewal, and administrative fees that local NGOs declared were exorbitant. HRW stated that NGOs “risk politically motivated charges for allegedly failing to comply with legal provisions that impose vague ‘special obligations’ on independent groups.” On May 10, the High Court ruled that the NGO Bureau’s August 2021 suspension of human rights organization Chapter Four Uganda was “irregular” and allowed Chapter Four to reopen. Human rights activists reported that government officials used the laborious registration process to delay issuance or renewal of permits to NGOs, then penalized NGOs for operating without permits. On June 22, President Museveni announced that he had lifted the 2021 suspension of the EU-funded Democratic Governance Facility, allowing it to operate through December with the government represented in the organization’s decision-making structures. On August 5, the government suspended the LGBTQI+ advocacy organization Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) after blocking it from registering. The government lifted the suspension



of some prodemocracy and human rights organizations it had imposed in 2021, including Chapter Four, but maintained the suspension of many others.

The government also restricted the operations of opposition political parties (see section 3, Elections and Political Participation).

### **c. Freedom of Religion**

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

### **d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country**

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.

### **e. Protection of Refugees**

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern. Most refugees enjoyed unhindered access to asylum, freedom of movement, freedom of residence, right to registration and documentation, and access to justice, education, health care, and employment.

**Access to Asylum:** The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. Individuals fleeing South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (if the Congolese are from eastern DRC) who enter the country through a designated border point have automatic *prima facie* refugee status (status without determination of individual refugee status). The local Refugee Eligibility Committee, however, determines whether individuals fleeing from Rwanda, Somalia, Burundi, and other countries are eligible for refugee status. The committee was functional, but COVID-19-era lockdowns, administrative matters, and the continued influx of asylum seekers continued to cause backlogs, despite efforts by UNHCR and the government to address them.

**Abuse of Migrants and Refugees:** Some refugees continued to report that government officials demanded bribes from refugees to process or issue paperwork, including for refugees to acquire land or food benefits. The Department of Refugees confirmed that it fired four field employees for bribery.

**Durable Solutions:** The government did not accept third-country refugees for resettlement, but it assisted in the safe and voluntary return of refugees to their homes and supported the resettlement of third-country refugees to other countries by providing birth certificates and travel documents. A 2015 Constitutional Court ruling confirmed that certain long-term refugees have the right to naturalize, and in 2016 the government committed to begin processing naturalization cases for an estimated 15,000 refugees who had resided in the country for approximately 20 years. There were no known cases of any refugee completing naturalization.

**Temporary Protection:** The government also provided temporary protection to approximately 50 individuals who were not registered as refugees, with the government designating them “guests of the president.” These individuals subsequently departed the country.

### **Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

The law provides citizens the ability to choose their government through free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. The law also allows authorities to carry out elections for local government officials by having voters line up behind their preferred candidate or the candidate’s representative, portrait, or symbol.

#### **Elections and Political Participation**

**Recent Elections:** In 2021 the country held its sixth presidential and legislative elections since President Museveni came to power in 1986. The Electoral Commission announced the president was re-elected with 58.4 percent of the vote, and NUP candidate Robert Kyagulanyi finished second with 35.1 percent. The ruling NRM party captured approximately 63.5 percent of the seats in the 529-member unicameral parliament. There were numerous irregularities prior to, during, and in the immediate aftermath of the elections. The East African

Community Observation Mission reported concerns regarding the commission's inability to register all eligible voters, a "disproportionate use of force in some instances and accusations of biased enforcement against opposition parties and candidates," and "actions taken against opposition parties and candidates when it came to accessing [broadcast journalism]." The group also raised concerns regarding the commission's failure to deliver "timely accreditation and issuance of accreditation documents to domestic observers." Authorities harassed and blocked some domestic independent election observers from observing the electoral process and limited the number of some foreign and diplomatic election observation missions. The government confirmed that it limited the number of accredited observers and enforced an internet blackout for five days.

The government held several parliamentary by-elections which media, opposition parties, and observers reported to feature voter harassment and intimidation by the security forces as well as ballot stuffing. On July 28, the government held a parliamentary by-election in Soroti East. Local media reported that, at 3 a.m., military and police officers fired teargas into the premises of opposition party Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) and Elysian Guest House. The military and police officials then broke in and arrested 70 supporters whom the party had intended to deploy as polling agents. A police spokesperson stated that they carried out the arrests because the suspects were planning to commit electoral fraud and were violating electoral laws by campaigning beyond the legally mandated time. The FDC reported that these arrests prevented it from carrying out meaningful election observation, including vote tabulation. Civil society leaders also shared videos of ballot stuffing.

**Political Parties and Political Participation:** Opposition parties reported that security agencies restricted their operations, especially during elections. The FDC accused police of arresting its officials when they held public rallies (see section 2.b.) and blocking party officials from participating in electoral campaigns. On July 24, police officers intercepted opposition leader Besigye's car at a highway restaurant in Jinja on his way to campaign in the Soroti East by-election and ordered him to return to Kampala. Besigye escaped arrest and used a motorcycle taxi to arrive in Soroti, but police impounded his vehicle and detained his driver and several of his supporters. A police spokesperson stated officials detained the

driver for exceeding the speed limit and later released the group without charge.

**Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups:** No law limits the participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. The law mandates affirmative-action seats in parliament and in local government councils be reserved for women, youth, senior citizens, and persons with disabilities, and the government implemented the law effectively. Cultural factors, high costs, and sexual harassment, however, limited women's ability to run for political office. Women activists reported the official fees required to secure a nomination to run for elected office were prohibitively high and prevented most women from running for election. Human rights activists also reported that many women were locked out of political positions because they lacked the minimum education qualifications for the positions, having been denied the right-to-education earlier in life. Activists reported violence and harassment committed by members of the security agencies discouraged women from turning up to cast their ballots, so many preferred to stay in the safety of their homes. Activists reported that the number of women legislators holding open seats dwindled because of the affirmative action policy, which reserved a legislative position for women in each district. They reported that internal political party processes locked women out of contesting for open seats, limiting them to affirmative action seats. Activists also reported that media coverage mocked and trivialized women candidates, as well as perpetuating the inequality and subordination of women.

## **Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government**

The law provides criminal penalties of up to 12 years' imprisonment and confiscation of the convicted persons' property for official corruption. Nevertheless, transparency civil society organizations stated the government did not implement the law effectively, and there were numerous reports of government corruption during the year. Officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity, and many corruption cases remained pending for years.

**Corruption:** On July 5, citing an April presidential directive, Minister of Works

and Transport Katumba Wamala ordered the appointment of Jenifer Bamuturaki as the new CEO of the three-year-old national carrier, Uganda Airlines. The appointment prematurely terminated a competitive search process that the government had reportedly paid a consulting firm 98.1 million shillings (\$26,700) to manage. Bamuturaki had previously been dismissed from the airline following procurement irregularities. The previous CEO, Cornwell Muleya, and 12 members of senior management were placed on forced leave in April 2021, following corruption allegations, and later fired on February 18. Muleya was arrested on June 21 after failing to appear before the Inspector General of Government (IGG) that was investigating financial mismanagement of public funds and irregular recruitment practices at the airline. A parliamentary select committee also began investigating the airline in August, focused on topics including profitability, irregular recruitment, and inflated employee salaries. The investigation continued at year's end.

On August 22, police working jointly with the IGG arrested 14 local government officials in Kitgum District following allegations of the misappropriation of 526 million shillings (\$143,000) intended for the Parish Development Model, a government-sponsored poverty-reduction program. According to investigators, the officials used 80 percent of the funds allocated to the district for administrative activities. On August 26, Kabale District police arrested four local government officials alleged to have withdrawn 111 million shillings (\$30,200) without authorization. The group claimed they used the funds to purchase fuel and lunch while raising awareness regarding the program. On September 13, media reported that, in the fiscal year 2021-22, district officials spent 1.5 billion shillings (\$407,000) of Parish Development Model funds on workshops and other activities not included in the implementation guidelines.

## **Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights**

A variety of domestic and international human rights groups operated under government restrictions. The president continued to accuse civil society of accepting funding from foreign donors interested in destabilizing the country. The

2021 blockage of funding and suspension of activities for some prodemocracy and human rights organizations continued, with dozens of organizations, including Citizens Coalition for Electoral Democracy Uganda, unable to resume operations. On January 25, the organization's chairperson resigned, alleging that the government was frustrating the organization's operations in view of her experience in opposition politics. Many NGO leaders stated that the process of obtaining five-year permits was lengthy and bureaucratic. Officials with one organization that spent eight months to obtain its five-year permit noted that foreign donors were unlikely to grant funds to organizations with the default one-year permit. Others added that the government was slow to renew work visas for expatriate staff, citing government mistrust of foreign staff at governance-focused NGOs.

**Retribution against Human Rights Defenders (HRDs):** In January activist and academic Stella Nyanzi left the country for Germany due to threats and intimidation. Nyanzi, who fled to Kenya for three months in 2021 and was imprisoned twice for her activism, stated she was threatened for voicing support for Rukirabashaija (see section 1.c). Environment and land rights conservationists reported that police harassed and arrested HRDs working to protect the environment and communities' access to land. On July 28, Yisito Kayinga Muddu of Community Transformation Foundation Network (COTFONE), an NGO working with persons affected by the East African Crude Oil Pipeline, reported that armed men raided his office and stole electronics and documents related to the NGO's work. Muddu, who relocated his family soon after the incident, stated he received threats from anonymous callers.

**Government Human Rights Bodies:** The UHRC is a constitutionally mandated institution with quasi-judicial powers authorized to investigate allegations of human rights abuses, direct the release of detainees, and award compensation to abuse victims. The president appoints its board, consisting of a chairperson and five commissioners.

The UHRC pursues suspected human rights abusers, including in the military and police forces. It visits and inspects places of detention and holds private conferences with detainees on their conditions in custody. It investigates reports of human rights abuses, reports its annual findings to parliament, and recommends measures to improve the executive branch's respect of human rights. The

government did not always implement UHRC recommendations during the year. On February 22, while appearing before the parliamentary human rights committee to discuss the UHRC's inability to address torture and human rights abuses committed by security forces, the UHRC chairperson alleged that there were deliberate efforts to use media to "portray heightened cases, particularly of torture, which are exaggerated or outright not true." While presenting the UHRC's 2021 annual report on June 13, the chairperson reported that inadequate funding limited the implementation of activities, with the UHRC allocated approximately one quarter of required funds. In August the UHRC chairperson explained that lack of resources would preclude tribunal activity in 2022. The report highlighted matters including the impact of COVID-19, human rights concerns in extractive industries, problems affecting refugees, and forced disappearances. Human rights activists and civil society organizations criticized the UHRC for not including a chapter dedicated to abuses surrounding the 2021 general election.

## **Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses**

### **Women**

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** The law criminalizes rape of women, which is punishable by life imprisonment or death. The law does not address spousal rape. The law defines rape as "unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or a girl without her consent." Men accused of raping men are tried using a law that prohibits "carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature." The law also criminalizes domestic violence and provides up to two years' imprisonment upon conviction.

Rape remained a common problem throughout the country, and the government did not effectively enforce the law. Local media and human rights activists reported numerous incidents of rape, sometimes involving kidnapping and killings of women, but authorities were often unable to investigate and hold perpetrators accountable. Local media often reported that perpetrators of rape included persons in authority, such as religious leaders, local government officials, police, intelligence and military officers, health-care workers, and academic staff (see section 1.c.). According to local media and human rights activists, many rape survivors lacked faith in government institutions to bring their abusers to justice

and declined to report the crime, while others remained silent to avoid stigmatization. Human rights activists and local media reported that, even when women reported cases of rape to police, officers blamed the women for causing the rape by dressing indecently, took bribes from the alleged perpetrators to stop the investigation and to pressure the survivors into withdrawing the cases, or simply dismissed the accusations and refused to record them. The Centre for Health Human Rights and Development, Foundation for Male Engagement, and police reported that police personnel lacked the required skills for collection, preservation, and management of forensic evidence in sexual violence cases. Local media reported that some police stations lacked women officers on the staff, which discouraged rape survivors from reporting their cases. Local media and human rights activists reported that women with disabilities, especially blind women and women with mental disabilities, were at a disproportionately higher risk for rape and other forms of gender-based violence (see section 6, Persons with Disabilities). Freedom and Roam Uganda reported that lesbians and transgender women suffered gender-based violence and rape in a reported attempt to change their sexuality (see section 6, Violence against LGBTQI+ Persons).

On April 21, NUP supporter Alexandria Marinos told a press conference that CMI officers had arrested her in March after she was found playing Kyagulanyi's music at her shop and detained her for two days at CMI headquarters in Mbuya where they tortured and raped her. She named a civilian with links to CMI, Erias Sengooba, and CMI officer Ali Hassan Matovu, respectively, of raping and torturing her. She displayed images of burn scars on her buttocks, which she stated were inflicted during her torture. The military refuted her claims and stated Marinos made up the allegations to benefit unjustly from the government's compensation of torture victims or to seek asylum abroad. The military spokesperson stated Marinos had a long-running relationship with the two accused going back to 2020. Sengooba stated Marinos was his neighbor and friend whom he occasionally offered financial support. The military displayed Marinos' telephone call records from March 27 until April 4, noting that she made numerous telephone calls during the days she was allegedly in detention, which they stated would be impossible for a detainee.

The minister of gender, labor and social development complained that judicial



officers denied justice to victims of gender-based violence by choosing to pursue out-of-court settlements or by delaying adjudication. In September judicial officials introduced special month-long court sessions to hear exclusively gender-based violence cases to increase access to justice for victims.

**Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C):** The law prohibits FGM/C and establishes a maximum penalty of 10 years' imprisonment for convicted perpetrators, or life imprisonment if the victim dies. The government did not effectively enforce the law. According to the 2016 Demographics and Health Survey, the latest available, 0.3 percent of the female population younger than age 50 had undergone FGM/C. Local media and government officials reported, however, that the practice was common among some communities along the eastern border with Kenya. Government health officials reported that some parents in the Karamoja and Sebei regions waited until teenage girls returned home during school holidays and then subjected them to FGM/C. Civil society organizations alleged that some families threatened to punish girls who report instances of FGM/C to authorities, leaving many cases to go unreported. Civil society organizations also reported that community elders, predominantly women, who conducted FGM/C procedures, continued the practice because they did not have alternative livelihoods to replace the 15,000-to-30,000-shilling (\$4 to \$8) payment from each procedure. Local government officials reported that community leaders continued to smuggle girls into Kenya – where law enforcement operations were allegedly lax – to undergo the procedure. Police reported that officers carried out community sensitization efforts to encourage behavior change. Civil society organizations reported that they worked with government to identify and relocated girls who were at risk of FGM/C to shelters.

**Other Forms of Gender-based Violence:** In November the UN Committee Against Torture stated it “deplore[d] that incidents of gender-based violence are still reported with domestic violence being the top crime, in 2021, according to the annual crime police report.” According to local media and human rights activists, violence against widows was prevalent. Local media reported that many widows in remote areas experienced sexual violence at the hands of their deceased husband's family and lost their rights to property (see section 6, Women, Discrimination). Human rights activists reported that in some rural and remote

areas, widows were chased away from their matrimonial homes by their deceased husband's families and were rendered homeless because their own families could not take them back after they had accepted the bride price from the husband's family.

**Sexual Harassment:** The law criminalizes sexual harassment and provides for penalties of up to 14 years' imprisonment, but authorities did not effectively enforce the law. Sexual harassment was a widespread problem in homes, schools, universities, workplaces, public transport, public spaces, media, and in the music and entertainment industry. Local media reported numerous incidents of senior executives and public servants in the legislature and judiciary who demanded sexual favors from female subordinates in exchange for job retention, promotion, and nomination for official trips. In May popular musician Sheebah Karungi reported that an unidentified senior official, who was guarded by the military's SFC, had sexually harassed her at a private party at which he had hired her to perform. She stated that the official confronted her in her car and inappropriately touched her. On May 18, police stated that Sheebah identified the official in her complaint. Police had not revealed findings of their investigations by year's end.

**Reproductive Rights:** There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

Human rights activists reported that although persons with disabilities had the right to access reproductive services, the absence of health workers with the ability to communicate with blind and deaf patients meant that many persons with disabilities did not receive sufficient information regarding reproductive health services. Human rights activists also reported that many women with disabilities depended on close family members for access to sexual and reproductive health services that limited their ability to make free choices regarding their sexual health. Women with disabilities told local media that public health facilities lacked adjustable gurneys, which hampered access. Local media also reported that some public health workers declined to attend to pregnant women with disabilities unless they employed a personal caretaker. Human rights activists reported that LGBTQI+ persons were able to provide informed consent before receiving reproductive health treatment, although many lesbians, bisexual, and queer women preferred to access sexual and reproductive health services at LGBTQI+ drop-in

centers as they found public health facilities not tailored to their needs. Human rights activists reported that some public health officials declined to provide health care, including reproductive health services, to LGBTQI+ persons.

Human rights activists and government officials reported that cultural practices in some remote areas impeded access to sexual and reproductive health services for women. They reported that men in some rural and remote areas refused to use contraception and in turn also prohibited their partners from accessing sexual and reproductive health services. Human rights activists reported that many public health service providers declined to provide sexual and reproductive health services to teenagers, particularly those age 17 and younger, because they had not attained the age of consent. This practice led to many cases of teenage pregnancies and a rise in HIV infection among teenage girls.

Human rights activists reported that Family and Child Protection Units at police stations provided postexposure prophylaxis for rape survivors but often referred survivors to shelters for emergency contraception.

Maternal mortality was 375 deaths per 100,000 live births, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Media attributed the high rate to an inability of pregnant women to access skilled medical care, a preference for traditional birth attendants over skilled medical workers, and unsafe abortions. Local media reported that a government directive that required health facilities to provide detailed accounts of the circumstances surrounding each maternal-related death led health facilities to decline admitting cases they considered to be in critical condition, which denied emergency healthcare to expectant mothers. According to the WHO, adolescent birth rates were high, at 111.4 per 1,000 girls for the period 2011 to 2020, the most recent period for which data were available. According to human rights activists and the WHO, the elevated adolescent pregnancy rate was caused by statutory rape, child sexual exploitation, a high rate of school dropouts, and limited knowledge of contraception among teenagers.

There were social and cultural barriers related to menstruation and access to menstruation hygiene that impacted girls' ability to participate equally in society, including many limits on girls' access to education. Many girls in school suffered stigmatization and bullying due to the lack of access to menstrual hygiene

products, which caused higher instances of dropouts. Local media and child rights activists reported that girls who became pregnant while in school almost always dropped out of school. According to child rights activists, public and private schools dismissed and declined to readmit girls who became pregnant. The government requires that all girls who become pregnant while in school undergo mandatory maternity leave at three months of the pregnancy and return to school six months after delivery. The policy requires that a boy responsible for the pregnancy simultaneously drop out of school until the girl returns. Human rights activists reported that teenage mothers who returned to school after giving birth quickly dropped out due to stigma and because schools lacked the capacity to cater to the needs of lactating mothers.

**Discrimination:** The law provides women the same legal status and rights as men, but the government did not enforce the law effectively. Human rights activists reported numerous cases of discrimination against women, including in divorce, employment, education, and owning or managing businesses and property. Many customary laws discriminate against women in adoption, marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Following customary laws in many areas, widowed women cannot own or inherit property or retain custody of their children. Human rights activists reported that lesbians, transgender, and queer women were at a higher risk of discrimination at public health facilities. Traditional divorce law in many areas requires women to meet stricter evidentiary standards than men to prove adultery. In some ethnic groups, men can “inherit” the widows of their deceased brothers. The law does not recognize cohabiting relationships, and women involved in such relationships had no judicial recourse to protect their rights.

## **Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination**

The law prohibits discrimination and violence based on race, ethnicity, religion, origin, social or economic standing, political opinion, and disability, but the government did not enforce the law effectively. Members of parliament, human rights activists, and local media reported that security officers and vigilantes associated with Second Deputy Prime Minister General Moses Ali, from the Madi ethnic community, continued harassing and evicting members of the Acholi community from disputed land in Apaa village in the northern part of the country so he could establish a private game reserve. Local media reported in January that

four residents of Apaa were killed in an attack on the village. A Ministry of Internal Affairs statement in February blamed the violence in Apaa on unnamed local political leaders, whom it accused of inciting the Madi and Acholi communities to attack each other. On June 6, local media reported that vigilantes raided Apaa, set 200 households on fire, and left 27 persons injured. The military and police blocked political leaders from accessing the village, reportedly to prevent exacerbating community tensions. On June 9, local media reported that President Museveni warned politicians against inciting community violence. He also promised to carry through with his 2021 promise to set up a commission of inquiry to investigate the land dispute but had not done so by year's end.

## **Indigenous Peoples**

Some Indigenous minorities continued to accuse the government of marginalization that excluded them from participating in decisions affecting their livelihood. Human rights activists reported that the government had not granted official recognition to several Indigenous communities, which led to political exclusion, limited access to social services, and limited access to livelihood resources. Human rights activists reported that the government only partially compensated and resettled Batwa and Benet communities whom it evicted from their ancestral lands to create wildlife protection areas in the eastern and southwestern parts of the country. Human rights activists reported that the government had not resettled many members of the Batwa and Benet communities nor issued land titles to those whom it had resettled, thus restricting their access to land for livelihood. According to local media, Benet communities, who were yet to be resettled, moved back into Mount Elgon National Park where Uganda Wildlife Authority game rangers forcefully re-evicted them.

## **Children**

**Birth Registration:** The law accords citizenship to children born inside or outside the country if at least one parent or grandparent is a citizen at the time of birth. Abandoned children younger than age 18 with no known parents are considered citizens, as are children younger than age 18 adopted by citizens.

The law requires citizens to register a birth within three months. Lack of birth

registration generally did not result in denial of public services, although some primary schools, especially those in urban centers, required birth certificates for enrollment. Enrollment in public secondary schools, universities, and other tertiary institutions required birth certificates.

**Education:** The law provides for compulsory education through the completion of primary school by age 13, and the government provided tuition-free education in select public primary and secondary schools (age six to age 18). Parents, however, were required to provide lunch and schooling materials for their children, and many parents could not afford such expenses. Local media and civil society organizations reported that child, early, and forced marriages and teenage pregnancy led to a higher rate of school dropouts for girls than for boys (see section 6, Women, Reproductive Rights). Some schools – particularly those managed by religious institutions – did not allow pregnant girls to return to school. While primary school enrollment remained high, according to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics’ 2021 research, only 27 percent of secondary school age children were enrolled in school. The government fully reopened schools on January 10, ending the 21-month school closure imposed as part of COVID-19 countermeasures. During this period, almost 6 million children in lower primary grades were unschooled.

Human rights activists reported that children from the Benet and Batuku indigenous communities were forced by local education authorities to undertake school instruction in the languages spoken by their larger neighboring ethnic groups, a practice they believed threatened their culture.

**Child Abuse:** The law prohibits numerous forms of child abuse and provides for monetary fines, five years’ imprisonment, or both for persons convicted of abusing children’s rights. Victims’ parents, however, often opted to settle cases out of court for a cash or in-kind payment. Corporal punishment in schools is illegal. In November the UN Committee Against Torture stated it was “concerned at reports that confirm that ‘reasonable chastisement’ is still recognized under common law and corporal punishment is not explicitly prohibited in all settings.”

Despite the law, a pattern of child abuse existed in sexual assault, physical abuse, ritual killings, early marriage, FGM/C, child trafficking, infanticide, and child

labor, among other abuses. According to the Statistics Bureau's 2021 research, 71 percent of children ages 10 to 14 experienced physical violence in the 12 months prior to the survey. On September 2, social media footage emerged of a woman beating a two-year-old child with a sandal on numerous occasions across the head, arms, legs, and back for failing to bathe, sparking public outrage. On September 3, police announced the arrest of Dorothy Nabulime, age 22, whom they identified as the woman in the video. On September 5, the public prosecutor charged Nabulime with cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment of a child. Nabulime pled guilty. On September 14, the court sentenced her to 18 months in prison.

**Child, Early, and Forced Marriage:** The legal minimum age for marriage is 18, but authorities generally did not enforce this law. Child marriages were prevalent and became even more so during school closures introduced as COVID-19 countermeasures. In June the government launched its second strategic plan to end child marriage and teenage pregnancy. Local media, human rights activists, political leaders, and police reported that some rural and remote communities in the southwestern part of the country forced teenage girls into marriage, sometimes even forcefully kidnapping them. Officials also noted that parents married off girls they could not financially support in return for money. Numerous government officials in the central and local governments regularly joined efforts led by child rights activists and cultural leaders to speak out and sensitize communities against child marriages. District probation officers at local governments also supported efforts led by child rights activists to rescue children from forced marriages and keep them in shelters before their gradual reintegration into communities. On August 9, police launched an investigation into an attempted forced marriage that became public after a video was widely circulated on social media showing a group of six men grabbing a girl, age 14, and forcing her into a waiting car. According to police, the girl's aunt and mother were promised money to take her to a man, age 55, waiting to marry the child. On August 15, police released a statement noting that it had rescued the girl, referred her to a shelter for psychosocial support, and arrested four men on kidnapping charges. Police had not reported whether they filed charges by year's end.

**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** The law prohibits commercial sexual exploitation, the sale and procurement of sexual services, and practices related to

child pornography. It sets the minimum age for consensual sex at 18. The law defines “statutory rape” as any sexual contact outside marriage with a child younger than 18, regardless of consent or age of the perpetrator. The government did not enforce the law effectively, however, and the problem was pervasive. Research from the Statistics Bureau, conducted in 2020, found that 59 percent of women experienced sexual violence before age 15. Civil society organizations, authorities, and media reported an increase in sexual exploitation of children. From 2019 to 2021, there was a 22 percent increase in pregnancy among girls and women age 10 to 24 and a 366 percent increase in reported pregnancies in girls and women age 15 to 19. The Statistics Bureau also found that one in five children who had used social media were victims of sexual harassment, including almost 25 percent of girls.

**Infanticide, Including Infanticide of Children with Disabilities:** The law criminalizes infanticide, including of children with disabilities, but authorities sporadically enforced the law. Local media reported that intersex children were at high risk of infanticide and that some parents of children with disabilities abandoned them in the bush or threw them in pit latrines to die. Local media also reported incidents where individuals kidnapped and killed children to use their organs for harmful practices related to accusations of witchcraft and ritual attacks. Child rights activists reported cases in which wealthy entrepreneurs and politicians paid traditional healers to sacrifice children to ensure their continued wealth and then bribed police officers to stop the investigations. Media reported in February that police had arrested a pastor and four others for the ritual killing of a boy, age six, in the eastern part of the country. The case continued at year’s end.

**Displaced Children:** Local civil society organizations and media reported that poverty and famine drove families in the remote northeastern Karamoja region to send many children to Kampala to find work and beg on the streets. Civil society organizations reported that traffickers often manipulated families in Karamoja to sell their children for 50,000 shillings (\$14) with promises the children would obtain a good education or a profitable job. Instead, traffickers forced the children to beg on the streets of Kampala or other major cities or work in domestic servitude and gave them almost none of the proceeds. Kampala City authorities worked with civil society organizations to return Karamojong street children to



their families, but often the families soon returned the children to the streets because families could not afford to care for them. Local media and child rights activists also reported increased numbers of homeless children in other towns, such as Mbale, Lira, and Gulu, where a lack of rehabilitation facilities frustrated local government efforts to remove the children from the streets. In July Kampala City authorities introduced a new law which criminalizes giving money, food, or clothing to children on the street.

## **Antisemitism**

The Jewish population numbered approximately 2,000 members centered in Mbale District, in the eastern part of the country. There were no reports of antisemitic acts.

## **Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Organ Harvesting**

Police, local media, and activists reported that organized criminal groups carried out organ harvesting. Police, local media, and human rights activists reported that some workers who signed up with labor recruitment companies to work in the Middle East and Arabian Gulf countries had their organs, especially kidneys and livers, harvested. In January local media reported that Judith Nakintu, a migrant worker in Saudi Arabia, had her right kidney harvested without her consent. Local media reported that Saudi court documents noted that Nakintu sustained injuries to her liver, lungs, and kidneys in a vehicle accident and the court awarded her 270 million shillings (\$73,300) in damages. The police medical unit, however, reported that Nakintu's right kidney had been harvested. Police also reported that Nakintu's employers took Nakintu to ostensibly secure a COVID-19 vaccine but instead had her right kidney harvested in an operation that left her paralyzed on the right side. On February 26, local media reported that the public prosecutor charged five employees of the firm that had recruited Nakintu with three counts of aggravated organ trafficking. A court later remanded them to Kitale Prison and

the trial continued at year's end.

## **Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics**

**Criminalization:** Consensual same-sex sexual conduct is illegal according to a colonial-era law that criminalizes “carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature” and provides for a penalty of up to life imprisonment. Although the government did not directly enforce this law, it used this provision indirectly to restrict the rights of LGBTQI+ persons.

**Violence against LGBTQI+ Persons:** Human rights activists reported instances of nonstate actor violence against LGBTQI+ persons and noted that authorities did not adequately investigate the cases. On September 10, human rights activists reported that a mob raped and beat a transgender woman after an acquaintance lured her out of her house. Human rights activists reported that police registered the case but did not report findings of their investigations by year's end. Human rights activists reported that lesbians and transgender women suffered gender-based violence and rape allegedly aimed at changing their sexuality (see Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals below).

**Discrimination:** The law prohibits discrimination based on sex, among other categories, but does not explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. The law does not recognize LGBTQI+ individuals, couples, or their families. Human rights activists reported that LGBTQI+ persons suffered stigma and faced discrimination in access to healthcare, employment, housing, and other social services. Human rights activists reported that families disowned LGBTQI+ persons and expelled them from households, which left many homeless and led others to conceal their sexual orientation. In May human rights activists reported that when two employees of the LGBTQI+ advocacy organization SMUG reported to police that an individual had vandalized their office, police instead accused them of assaulting the individual, arrested them, and refused to investigate their complaint. On June 8, the public prosecutor charged them with assault and the court released them on

bail. Their trial continued at year's end.

**Availability of Legal Gender Recognition:** The country did not permit individuals to change their gender identity marker on legal and identifying documents to bring them into alignment with their gender identity. The law also did not provide the option of identifying as “non-binary/intersex/gender non-conforming.” Human rights activists reported that transgender persons could officially change their names, but government officials blocked them from changing their gender marker on official documents. One individual, however, Cleopatra Kambugu, legally changed her gender identity marker to female in 2021.

**Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals:** Human rights activists reported that LGBTQI+ persons endured intense social pressure to change their sexual orientation. Activists reported that some families had LGBTQI+ children undergo counseling sessions with religious leaders or compelled their LGBTQI+ children into arranged and forced marriages in an attempt to change their sexual orientation. Some government officials openly encouraged attempts to change the sexual orientation of LGBTQI+ persons.

**Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly:** The government restricted LGBTQI+ organizations' ability to legally register and operate. Authorities used provisions of the Companies Act to restrict or deny the registration of LGBTQI+ advocacy organizations due to allegations that the proposed names of the organizations were undesirable and their activities unlawful (see section 2.b.). On August 3, officials in the NGO Bureau instructed SMUG to halt operations because it was neither incorporated at the Uganda Registration Services Bureau nor registered with the NGO Bureau, both of which are a requirement for all nonprofit organizations. The suspension of SMUG remained in effect at year's end. Numerous other LGBTQI+ organizations reported that the NGO Bureau declined their registration applications, even after they had secured incorporation at the Uganda Registration Services Bureau, and threatened to halt their operations.

## **Persons with Disabilities**

The law criminalizes discrimination of persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental disabilities but persons with disabilities could not access education and health services on an equal basis with others. The law provides for access on an equal basis to education, employment, health services, information, communications, buildings, transportation, and the judicial system for persons with disabilities, but the government did not effectively enforce the law. According to disability rights activists, persons with disabilities lacked equitable access to public buildings and transportation. Activists reported that many public schools, hospitals, and courts lacked ramps to enable access for persons with disabilities. Although the government's information office, Uganda Media Centre, employed a sign-language interpreter whenever public officers used the office to make official communications, the UHRC reported that many other government agencies did not provide the service. Human rights activists reported that many persons with a disability in rural or remote areas failed to access COVID-19 vaccines because the government had located vaccination centers in urban areas, which were not easily accessible for persons with disabilities.

Human rights activists reported that authorities failed to protect persons with disabilities from harassment and violence from some sections of the community. Activists reported that many police and local government officials lacked knowledge of the specific needs of persons with disabilities, especially persons with mental illness, and many times encouraged and participated in harassment. Human rights activists also reported that persons with disabilities experienced discrimination in social service delivery and employment, while women with disabilities were at higher risk of rape and sexual harassment than women without disabilities (see section 6, Women, Rape and Domestic Violence).

According to the latest Ministry of Education statistics from 2016, 2 percent of elementary school students were children with disabilities while the rate in secondary schools was 0.6 percent. Human rights activists reported that many parents of children with disabilities in rural and remote areas hid them from the public and denied them an education due to the perception it would bring shame to the family.

## **Other Societal Violence or Discrimination**

Mob violence was prevalent. Communities often resorted to mob violence due to a lack of confidence in police and the judiciary to deliver justice. They attacked and killed persons suspected of robbery, homicide, rape, theft, ritual sacrifice, and witchcraft, among other offenses. Mobs often beat, lynched, burned, and otherwise brutalized their victims. On July 28, local media reported that a mob in Fort Portal town lynched and burned the corpse of a man suspected of a killing and theft. Police stated they would investigate the killing but did not reveal any findings by year's end.

HIV-related stigma and discrimination was a concern in some employment situations. Police, the prisons service, and the military regularly refused to recruit persons living with HIV and AIDS, claiming their bodies would be too weak for the rigorous training and subsequent deployment. According to local media, labor export companies required applicants seeking work in Arabian Gulf countries to undergo HIV tests and refused to hire persons living with HIV and AIDS. Civil society organizations also reported that employers declined to employ persons living with HIV and AIDS as domestic workers.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

### **a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

The law provides for workers, except members of the armed forces, to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development (Ministry of Labor) must register unions before they may engage in collective bargaining. The law requires registration of a labor union to be completed within 90 days and provides the registrar authority to suspend and interdict union elected officers if the officer is convicted by a court of law or under investigation with potential prosecution. The law gives the registrar authority to cancel a union's registration if the union's principal objectives or constitution become unlawful. The law does not define what constitutes unlawful objectives. The law precludes noncitizens from becoming members of the executive committee of a trade union. The law gives the registrar authority to inspect the trade union books of account and membership.

The law allows unions to conduct activities without interference, prohibits antiunion discrimination by employers, and provides for reinstatement of workers dismissed for union activity. The law also empowers the minister of labor and labor officers to refer disputes to the Industrial Court if initial mediation and arbitration attempts fail. The law, however, gives government labor officers power to declare industrial actions illegal if a given officer has taken steps to resolve the labor dispute in question through conciliation. The NGO Platform for Labor Action (PLA) reported that a 2021 amendment to the law intended to speed up the courts had stalled cases after funding shortfalls hindered the appointment of the required number of judges to the Industrial Court.

The government did not effectively enforce the law. Civil society organizations stated that Ministry of Labor officials did not allocate sufficient funds to hire, train, and equip labor officers to enforce labor laws effectively. Employers who violated a worker's right to form and join a trade union or bargain collectively faced penalties that were not commensurate with similar abuses. Administrative and judicial procedures were subject to lengthy delays and appeals. The PLA reported that some companies refused to honor awards handed down by the Industrial Courts and workers were forced to incur additional costs for the proceedings.

The government and employers generally did not respect the constitutionally guaranteed rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining. The law does not provide trade union federations with a right to engage in collective bargaining and further imposes mandatory conciliation to resolve labor disputes before a strike action is recognized. The law gives the government the right to declare a strike illegal, and the minister of labor has authority to refer a dispute to the Industrial Court. Under the law, trade unions are required to provide notice and adhere to the time limits set for public meetings. Employees in the essential services are required to provide 14 to 22 days' notice of their intent to strike. However, the law gives the minister authority to nullify such notice by referring the matter to the Industrial Court for arbitration and settlement within 14 days.

The Uganda Medical Association (UMA) and the Federation for Uganda Medical Interns announced a strike by medical interns in November 2021, citing the government's failure to honor terms including salary increases and improved working conditions that ended a May 2021 strike. Media reported in December

2021 that police arrested 27 members of the UMA as they attempted to march to parliament to meet the speaker and discuss their ongoing industrial action. A senior Ministry of Health official directed hospital administrators to fire all interns participating in the strike and replace them with the incoming class of interns, but this order was later rescinded and both organizations suspended their six-week industrial action later in December 2021.

Through their unions, public sector groups including teachers, and health workers staged strikes during the year, largely over low salaries. In June, the Uganda National Teachers' Union called a nationwide strike in response to discriminatory pay as the government moved forward with plans to prioritize salary increases for science teachers without a corresponding increase for humanities teachers. The Ministry of Public Service initially responded by ordering all teachers to report to work or the government would treat their nonattendance as resignations. The teachers' union ended the industrial action in July after President Museveni declined to agree to their demands during a meeting with union leaders.

The National Organization of Trade Unions reported that employment remained precarious following significant layoffs during the COVID-19 lockdown period. As a result, union activity remained limited compared to prepandemic levels as workers focused on simply having jobs rather than organizing for better working conditions. The organization added that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some collective bargaining agreements between unions and employers remained on hold.

## **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children, but does not prohibit prison labor. The law states that prison labor constitutes forced labor only if a worker is “hired out to, or placed at the disposal of, a private individual, company, or association.” The government did not effectively enforce the law. Human rights activists reported that it lacked the means to inspect places of concern through a limited number of labor inspectors and inadequate financing for their operations. The PLA reported that recruitment companies were one of the few industries where penalties were enforced, noting the government's suspension of companies violating their recruitment permits and workers' rights. In July, the government suspended the licensing of new labor firms pending a report on

protection measures for migrant workers.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

### **c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment**

See the Department of Labor's Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor>.

### **d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation**

The law prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, color, ethnic origin, religion, political opinion, national origin or citizenship, social origin, refugee or stateless status, disability, age, language, and HIV or communicable disease status. Sexual orientation and gender identity are not protected categories under the law.

The government did not effectively enforce the law. Penalties were not commensurate with those for similar abuses and were rarely applied. LGBTQI+ persons faced social and legal discrimination in hiring and employment. According to the Statistics Bureau, on average women's salaries were 63 percent of men's salaries, with greater disparity in urban areas, where women were paid less than half of men's salaries. Women also faced discrimination in employment and hiring as well as broad economic discrimination (see section 6, Women).

### **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

**Wage and Hour Laws:** The law technically provides for a national minimum wage much lower than the government's official poverty income level. This minimum wage standard was never implemented, and the level had not changed since 1984.

The maximum legal workweek is 48 hours, and the maximum workday is 10 hours. The law provides that the workweek may be extended to 56 hours, including overtime, with the employee's consent. An employee may work more than 10 hours in a single day if the average number of hours over a period of three weeks does not exceed 10 hours per day or 56 hours per week. For employees who



work beyond 48 hours in a single week, the law requires employers to pay a minimum of 1.5 times the employee's normal hourly rate for the overtime hours, and twice the employee's normal hourly rate for work on public holidays. For every four months of continuous employment, an employee is entitled to seven days of paid annual leave.

**Occupational Safety and Health:** The law establishes appropriate occupational safety and health (OSH) standards and regulations for all workers. The law authorizes labor inspectors in the Ministry of Labor's Department of Occupational Safety and Health to access and examine any workplace unannounced, issue fines, and mediate some labor disputes. While the law allows workers to remove themselves from situations that endanger their health or safety without jeopardizing their employment, legal protection for such workers was ineffective. According to the PLA most workers were unaware of their employers' responsibility to ensure a safe working environment, and many did not challenge unsafe working conditions, due to fear of losing their jobs. In July, the Minister for Labor led an unannounced inspection of factories in an industrial park in Jinja, including a Chinese-owned factory that had a history of poor working conditions. The minister ordered the arrest of a Chinese national who tried to block the inspection and found poor sanitation and safety violations including limited protective gear. Many of the workers lacked contracts and told the minister their employer assaulted and threatened to arrest individuals who complained regarding working conditions.

**Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement:** The Ministry of Labor and local government labor offices are responsible for enforcement of wage and hour laws. Inspection was insufficient to enforce compliance. In addition to inspectors, the country had labor officers who had the mandate to conduct inspections of worksites, focusing on standards of employment and workers' rights more broadly. Labor officers have the authority to make unannounced inspections, initiate sanctions, instigate prosecutions of repeat offenders through the Industrial Court, and close worksites. With 189 labor officers covering more than 130 districts, the number of labor officers combined with the 21 labor inspectors was insufficient for the size of the country's workforce, which included more than 15 million workers. Labor officers often depended on complainants and local civil society

organizations to pay for their travel to inspection sites. PLA officials reported that many of the labor officers were dual-hatted as social workers and did labor-related work only when a complainant reported an abuse. PLA officials also reported that companies often did not respect the recommendations made by labor officers during workplace inspections, including providing contracts or protective wear.

Authorities rarely enforce labor laws on wages and hours, and penalties were not commensurate with those for similar abuses. The legal minimum wage was never implemented, and civil society organizations reported that most domestic employees worked all year without leave. Wage arrears were common in both the public and private sectors. Workers' claims for overtime wages were difficult to enforce as they lacked documentation of their accumulated hours. PLA officials reported that abuses of standard wages and overtime pay were common in the manufacturing, education, private security, retail, private healthcare, and transport sectors. PLA officials also reported that because of an increase in commodities prices, they recorded increases in unpaid wages, shortened hours, and reduction of contract durations as well as terminations. In one example, a bakery illegally reduced workers' salaries by 70 percent, stating that the high cost of maize flour and cooking oil had affected company profits.

The same inspectors conducted wage, hour, and OSH inspections. Authorities rarely enforce OSH laws and penalties were not commensurate with those for similar abuses. Workers in the mining, construction, and textile sectors faced hazardous and exploitive working conditions. The PLA reported that abuses of safety and health standards were common in the manufacturing, education, private security, and transport sectors.

**Informal Sector:** According to 2017 government statistics, the most recent available, the informal sector employed up to 86 percent of the labor force primarily in agriculture, the service industry, trade, domestic work, construction, and transport. Labor officials reported that labor laws did not effectively protect workers in the informal economy, including many domestic and agricultural workers. Live-in domestic workers were at increased risk of poor working conditions, forced to work longer hours without compensation in homes during lockdown periods, often not provided with medical care, and subject to reduced wages. The law excludes some self-employed informal workers from social

security insurance eligibility, particularly those with no history of mandatory coverage.